

Chris Harte, *A History of Australian Cricket*. Andre Deutsch, London, 1993. Appendices, illus. index. pp. 779.

If the number of books written on Australian cricket is any indication, then it is without doubt our national game. The amount of cricket literature that has been produced over the last forty years has been prolific, as a cursory glance around the Melbourne Cricket Club Library will testify.

A number of general cricket historians have been written, ranging from Jack Egan's modest and succinct *The Story of Cricket* to Jack Pollard's multi-volume description of the game that came under the umbrella title of *Australian Cricket*. Having recently read Pollard's lengthy work, I decided that there was nothing much left to say about the game's local history. How wrong I was. Chris Harte, who has previously written detailed histories of the Sheffield Shield and the South Australian Cricket Association, has come along and written an 800 page 'blockbuster' which provides not just a review of the major events in Australia's rich and diverse cricket history, but also a critical assessment of the game's administration.

Like all good moralists, Chris has used a lively and provocative writing style, and has not been afraid to make firm and direct comments about players and administrators. For example, when writing about the 'Golden Age' between 1893 and 1914, he noted that while this period produced 'superlative efforts and contests', it also produced a lot of 'poor' behaviour 'off the field'. According to Harte, it 'was not uncommon for there to be fist fights in committee rooms, corruption and bribery, and the fixing of matches'.

Harte traverses an enormous amount of cricket ground, but does not 'plod' in the way that some general cricket historians do. He brings every incident to life, whether it is the formation and subsequent demise of the Australasian Cricket Council during the latter part of the nineteenth century, the involvement of Arthur Gilligan, the captain of the England test

team in 1924-5, with the British Union of Fascists, the Bodyline series of 1932-3, or the 1948 test series against England.

Harte's extensive description of the 1950s and 1960s is interesting, particularly in the light of this period's somewhat scanty treatment in other general cricket histories. He begins by stating that cricket was declining in popularity during the early part of the 1950s, and that this was of great concern to cricket officials, who could also see other sports like tennis and Australian football 'gaining strength'. Harte suggests that while administrators were aware of the 'need to reform the game' they 'had no idea how to go about doing it'. According to Harte, the salvation of Australian cricket came with the exciting 1960-1 series against the West Indies, and not through any flash of administrative brilliance. It was a player-led recovery.

Harte proceeded to race (sometimes too quickly, in my view) through the 1960s, pausing to reflect upon the introduction of Sunday play and sponsorship. He slowed down when discussing the 1970s, and provided a detailed account of the 'Chappellera' and Packer's WSC. Harte whetted my appetite for his next book when he indicated that he had gained access to leaked documents which tell what really 'happened behind the scenes' during the WSC\ACB dispute. Unfortunately, he was not able to publish the details in this book. The last few chapters covered the ebb and flow of the game during the 1980s and early 1990s, and documented the growing commercialisation and professionalisation of first class cricket at this time.

While scholarly pedants like myself may want to complain that Harte too often jumps from one issue to another without linking them, and leaves some interesting issues open ended, these are minor concerns. It is obvious that Harte has a detailed knowledge of the game, and has used many primary source documents. As a result, Harte's book has a breadth and richness that has eluded most other popular histories of Australian cricket. It is not an academic analysis of cricket, and it does not always put

the game in its commercial and cultural context, but this does not detract from its value and interest. It is not a book that can be read at one sitting, and I do not expect that the author would have intended it to be read that way. This book is both 'racy' and dense, 'glossy' and deep. It is informative, provocative and highly entertaining, and while I do not agree with everything that Harte writes, I recommend it as a superior popular history and evaluation of the 'national game'.

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Thomas V Hickie, *They Ran with the Ball: How Rugby Football Began in Australia*. Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1993.

Appendices, illus., index. pp. 243. \$29.95.

This excellent pioneering work will become an essential starting point for anyone undertaking research on rugby football in Australia.

Soldiers in Sydney in 1829, the *Sydney Monitor* reported, were in 'the habit of amusing themselves with the game of football', a rough and unregulated game with few known rules and indefinite numbers of participants that had its origins in the rural parishes of England in preindustrial times. Whatever varieties of football were played in Sydney up to the mid-1860s went largely unrecorded. After exploring football before the Gold Rush Tom Hickie culled the newspapers of the day to provide a detailed analysis from the first recorded game in July 1865 between the Sydney and Australian clubs to 1881, a time when Sydney was emerging as a modern mass transit metropolis. Hickie's thorough and readable narrative traces the emergence of clubs, disputes over rules, the patronage and organisation of the game, crowd behaviour on unenclosed public parks and the difficulty of obtaining grounds on which to play